



FRIENDS OF FISHBOURNE ROMAN PALACE

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Member, British Association of Friends of Museums

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Rabbit Unravelled! - Rob Symmons, Curator

It was quite a week over Easter when we released the exciting news that Fishbourne Roman Palace is the home to the earliest rabbit so far found in Britain. This is especially exciting in light of the fact we also have previously found the earliest fallow deer in Britain as well as some extremely strange exotic chicken breeds. Clearly the Palace was more than a dramatic architectural statement of power; it was also populated by exotic creatures presumably intended to demonstrate to the local population the Roman mastery over nature.

Specifically, the discovery was of a rabbit tibia that had been excavated in 1964 but only recognized as important in 2017. The two year delay in making the announcement was spent conducting the chemical analyses that proved the Roman date of the find (carbon dating), confirmed it was indeed a rabbit (DNA testing) and even that it appeared to have been kept in a hutch or cage (isotope analysis). All this work has resulted in the destruction of the bone itself, but you can still see it in digital form at this website: <https://bit.ly/2HsUbYR>

The press launch of our new discovery was a predictably busy time, with Melanie and me putting in some exceedingly long days. As well as fielding press enquiries, we had to manage a few comments on social media that apparently called the discovery into question. A minority were keen to point out that the presence of rabbits in Britain has apparently long been established, and some cited other previous British discoveries of Roman rabbit bones. This is a difficult situation to cope with as the work has not yet been published so there is a limit to the amount of detail ☹

we can reveal. It was possible to provide reassurance, however, that the Fishbourne bunny is indeed the first *confirmed* rabbit in Britain. Other claims exist only as references in classical texts, or relate to bones that may be from some other, similar-sized, animal. Furthermore, modern rabbits have a habit of burrowing into older archaeological layers and dying. So, it is important that our specimen is the only one so far that has been confirmed by both DNA testing and carbon dating.

The whole experience has been great fun and it has been brilliant to be able to have been part of the "Exploring the Easter E.g" project team who made the discovery. The project is a perfect example of the importance of archives like the one stored at Fishbourne, and how bringing together a wide range of diverse specialists from across the country can achieve amazing results. The project is already revealing other secrets about the history of rabbits and hares in Britain, including new information about the Fishbourne bunny. Keep up to date with their work through the project website: <https://www.easter-origins.org/>."

Melanie Marsh – Property Manager, Fishbourne

After my first four months at Fishbourne Roman Palace, I feel I can reflect on my initial impressions of Fishbourne Roman Palace and just how quickly these four months have gone by!



One of the most inspiring first impressions of Fishbourne Roman Palace is the friendly and supportive people that work and volunteer here. When I visited the Palace as a visitor, I noticed how helpful everyone was and when I started working here in February, I realised just how true this was and how fortunate the site is to benefit from all of its supporters. The Friends of Fishbourne Roman Palace are a key part of this and I am looking forward to working with them to develop the Palace in the future. I feel privileged to work in such a wonderful place; in a site that has the power to inspire young and old alike; that welcomes visitors from all over the world so warmly and that promotes academic research to enable new knowledge to be shared as widely as possible.

Within my first few months, Fishbourne Roman Palace has welcomed over 20000 visitors and made the front page of The Times with a Roman rabbit – all of this reminds me of why I work in heritage and how exciting and varied each day can be. I came to the Palace from The Rifles Museum in Winchester and was keen to get back to my heritage site roots, as I started my career with the National Trust and Harewood House Trust. In just four months, Fishbourne Roman Palace's dynamic nature and paradox of being both indoors and outdoors, conservation and access,

academia and social media has been an enjoyable challenge and there are so many wonderful ideas within the team to take the site forward for the future. I can't wait for the next four months!

Pam Crowe –

The Chairman's Thoughts



Like a 'bad penny', at the AGM in April I returned as Chairman of the Friends (for one year only). I am now busy catching up with the many changes which have taken place during my absence from the Committee – from the material to the personnel. One of my first steps was to meet with the new Property Manager, Melanie Marsh, to gain an insight into how she sees the conservation and presentation of this unique site developing. I look forward to continuing with her the warm working relationship I had previously shared with Katrina as we discussed the ways in which we Friends could help.

I am pleased to see how well the lavender plants we funded have taken to their sunny position before the wall. The garden was an integral part of life at the Palace and the weather this year promises that it will enhance the pleasure of everyone's visit.

As usual, I shall be taking the opportunity to dress up as a Roman to help at some of the popular activity days during school holidays throughout the year. Though many of you are committed to spending time with your own young family members at these times, if you have any days spare, I know extra help with the activities would be appreciated. The number which can be offered is directly dependent upon how many volunteers are on site. It's a sad fact of life that this piece ☹

of our heritage cannot be properly maintained and kept open for all to learn from and enjoy without the entrance fees and having lots for children to see and do boosts attendances. In addition to raising

funds as an organisation, Friends can support the Palace individually by volunteering and I would encourage you to give it a try.

Do come and have a word with me any time you see me about the Palace or garden.

The Friends' Annual General Meeting

Anne de Potier —



The meeting in April took place just a week after the media frenzy about The Rabbit and there was much excitement. Rob Symmons filled in some of the background and provided some 'behind the scenes' insights, and pointed out that the project responsible for this discovery is an excellent example of how the Palace can collaborate with an interdisciplinary group of specialists to achieve nationally important results.

Rob gave the report on the past year as Melanie Marsh, the new Property Manager, had only recently taken up her position. She had hoped to attend but was unable to join us. Rob said that Ian Lansley, the Head Gardener, had also moved on and hoped the new gardener will be as grateful for the Friends' donation of the lavender plants and "Gator" vehicle as Ian was.

Graham Moore, Operations Manager at Sussex Archaeological Society, will be helping with operational matters. His time is shared across the SAS sites, and he will be at the Palace for one day per week. He has already taken on a review of the site's security, drainage and health and safety.

Rob reminded us that 2018 was the 50th anniversary of the Museum at the Palace. This was marked by a number of events, for staff, visitors and specially invited guests. We also celebrated by unveiling the Headley Trust Viewing Platform in the North Wing as well as a new interactive area. Both are significant improvements to the visitor offer. Staff at the Palace were especially happy and grateful to receive a significant donation of books for our archaeology library from David Rudkin. These have been catalogued and the book plates, funded by the Friends, applied. They should be shelved in the next month or two.

Rob was delighted to report that the cataloguing of the artefacts was completed. This places it amongst the highest quality collections in the country. Focus now is on

using the artefacts for research, and perhaps pursuing designated status.

He reported on another project, led by Royal Holloway, University of London, but incorporating museums and specialists on both sides of the Atlantic. It aims to use cutting edge data science, machine learning and artificial intelligence methods to gather and analyse visitor data and better engage with visitors. For the purposes of this project, the Palace will be focusing on family visitors to better understand how they use the site and how their experience can be improved. To this end, Melanie has been busy making improvements to the café, trying to use the most local produce possible and to make the area a little bit more family (and dog, and cyclist!) friendly. They are looking forward to more improvements in the future.

In conclusion Rob said it has been a good (50th) year at the Palace. As ever they have been incredibly grateful for the support from the Friends of Fishbourne Roman Palace. "Like many friends groups, you have been hugely helpful with financial support, but, perhaps more importantly you have been true friends."

In her **Chairman's Report** Christine Medlock



avoided duplicating other reports and noted at the outset that the year had seen the passing of a dear friend, Dr. Nev Haskins. Condolences were sent to Mary and all the family.

Christine said that the Friends had been able to make significant donations to Fishbourne Roman Palace: a new garden maintenance machine which has halved the hours of landscape maintenance effort for the gardener, a marquee and chairs to help the staff and volunteers at events, and money for the purchase of fabrics for authentic costumes. The Friends also paid for the bookplates which now adorn the books donated by David Rudkin. The committee had invested in new leaflets, redesigning the look and feel and hoped they will help sell the benefits of Friendship more effectively.

Finally, Christine explained that this was her farewell as Chair and said it had been ☺

an honour to represent everyone and be part of such a hardworking team. She was applauded.



In his **Treasurer's report**, Paddy Thomas said subscription income was up by £148, equivalent to 8 members. There have been generous donations from members with their renewals, totalling an invaluable

£121.20. This was greatly appreciated. Paddy invited Joan Rundle to elaborate on membership data; she said that current membership was 8 life, 36 single, 16 family (so minimum 32), making a total of 76, the same as the previous year. Donations had increased by £99.50. The running costs had risen by £377.82, because of producing the new leaflet. If that were excluded, running costs had reduced by £72.18. Paddy expected them to rise this year because of increased postage costs.

Money donated to the Palace increased to £3415.41. Paddy pointed out that in the last two years we had donated £6,000, and could be proud of that. He also said that his aim was to give as much as reasonably possible and hoped this would happen in the coming year. Paddy reported for information that the total assets of the Friends is £6,717.90. Pam Crowe proposed a vote of thanks from the floor which was agreed with applause.

As Christine has stepped down from the Chair because of her role as Chairman of Trustees of Sussex Archaeological Society (to which she was elected in June 2018), we elected Pam Crowe as our new **Chairman**. We were very grateful that she was prepared to take this on. Other Officers and committee members remained the same. There was a modest attendance of 17 for the meeting (though a good turnout of guests for the excellent talk in the afternoon, see below), and we were just quorate, but it would be good if more people came in future. Next year the meeting will be on Saturday 25 April.

Your committee 2019-20

As a reminder the Friends' committee now consists of:

David Rudkin MA – President

Pam Crowe – Chair

Anne de Potier – Secretary

Joan Rundle - Membership Secretary

Paddy Thomas – Treasurer

Dorothy Lawson, Keith Lawson, Richard New,
Guy Lockton – Committee Members

A new project for SAS

Rob Symmons

Sussex Archaeological Society are to be part of an exciting new project that hopes to better understand visitor needs and engage with the public. The project, led by Royal Holloway, University of London, will create a professional network that will explore the best ways to use recent advances in data science to improve the visitor experience. These new developments in data science have been used successfully in the commercial world, but they also offer a wealth of possibilities for cultural and heritage institutions.

It is anticipated that the network will develop methodologies for using existing visitor data (eg visitor numbers, social media comments, feedback forms) to unlock the full potential of museums. Staff from Fishbourne will work with other SAS properties and the project partners on the project and the results should be available by the end of 2019. Project partners include the Historic Royal Palaces, the JORVIK Group, Franklin Institute (Pennsylvania), Colonial Williamsburg (Virginia), and pioneers in machine learning and augmented reality. We are delighted to be working alongside these world leaders in heritage and data science and look forward to sharing expertise with them.

In recent weeks a mysterious collection of little black domed objects appeared around the Palace. Placed on shelves, desks and occasionally attached to rope parries (there are 19 in all) this crop of strange plastic disks are in fact for monitoring levels of Radon



gas. Believe it or not, Fishbourne is in a 1-3% risk area for this radioactive gas. While the risks are low they are still high enough for us to have to monitor its levels. We only had to do this once and after three months we collected all of the monitors to check whether any further action is necessary. This course of action was recommended to us by our *Radiation Protection Advisor*, who helps us stay legal with use of the x-ray machine.

NEANDERTHALS OF THE WESTERN ENGLISH CHANNEL

Dr. Beccy Scott BA
MA PhD

(British Museum,
Prehistory & Europe
Department)



Lecture given to the
Friends of Fishbourne Palace following the
Annual General Meeting on 19 April 2019
Recorded by Richard New

Dr. Scott kindly agreed to present this talk after the conclusion of our AGM. She commenced by stating that “The Neanderthals were of their time, but are in many ways the same as us (ie: Homo Sapiens)”, and it is now proven that Homo Sapiens shares up to 2.7% of Neanderthal DNA. With regard to the relationship between Neanderthals and modern humans, Dr. Scott explained that she is interested not in their differences, or in how the former became extinct, but in how they interacted.

Most of the evidence of Neanderthal society and culture comes from their stone tools, and the choices made in producing these. In the Early/Middle Palaeolithic (Levallois) a complicated methodology of flint flaking provided flexible use, allowing Neanderthals to undertake preoccupations previously thought of as purely Homo Sapiens, such as selective and communal hunting. In the last five years even more examples of complicated behaviour have become apparent, such as the use of resin for setting flint flakes in weapons (complete with Neanderthal thumbprints in pitch !), and the re-examination of previously classified Homo Sapiens bone tools to reclassify them as Neanderthal.

In the Middle/Late Palaeolithic, Neanderthals began to manufacture their tools in many different ways, ie: more like Homo Sapiens, and examples of “social signalling” in Neanderthal culture have been identified, such as evidence of fire in stalagmites in caves at Bruniquel in SW France, and evidence of shell beads, use of raptor wing feathers (for decoration ?), and evidence of compassion and care in burials.

Why is the western English Channel an area of research for Neanderthal culture ? It must be remembered that the “Channel Valley” was then a lived landscape, not a barrier, and we must move away from a perception of a binary Britain at that time. We must look for much Neanderthal evidence underwater, as it takes only a small drop in current sea levels to “re-invent” the Channel Valley. The immediate locality of the Channel Islands and the French coastline are of igneous & metamorphic formation, thus the Neanderthals, in fact, would have had to trek some way from the area of the Channel Islands into, or beyond, the Channel Valley, to obtain flint for tool-making, an indication of the likely ‘trading’ connections in place even then.

Dr. Scott went on to detail her research at La Cotte de St. Brélade, on the SW coast of Jersey, where there is evidence of continuity of Neanderthal occupation from 240k to 27k years ago, which has been supported by marine surveys up to 5 kms from the present shoreline.



St Brélade, Jersey

In passing, Dr. Scott disabused us of the ‘myth’ of Neanderthal ‘mammoth drives’ from the tops of cliffs, as such terrain is unlikely to ever have been accessible by these creatures, whilst the submerged landscapes revealed by marine survey indicate a much more favourable hunting terrain of canyons and blind cut-offs.

Work was conducted in the 1980’s which reorganised and classified up to 95k of local Neanderthal artefacts, including reassigning them to stratigraphic locations, and refitting flaked cores, and helped to allow reconsideration of Neanderthal movements, and the difficulty of access to the nearest flint resources, in mid-Channel. Dr. Scott concluded by describing research by her, and her colleagues, in 2013 at Petit Portelet, on the south coast of Jersey, which indicated persistent reuse of flint artefacts ☞

over millennia, emphasising the growing remoteness of flint resources, with changes in local sea levels.

Dr. Scott took several questions from the floor, including the following two :

Q.1 Was the Neanderthal body more suited for a sprinting form of hunting ?

A.1 Dr. Scott replied that that certainly seemed to be the case, whereas Homo Sapiens hunting is more dependent on persistent pursuit, thus wearing the prey down. Neanderthal hunting, therefore, seems to have required more close-up work, emphasised by their flint tools/weapons, which are not suited for long-range attacks.

Q.2 What evidence is there for shared Neanderthal and Homo Sapiens DNA ?

A.2 Dr. Scott replied that there is evidence of Neanderthal and Homo Sapiens hybrids, of the second generation at least, proving that the offspring were therefore fertile. Both genomes show advantages and disadvantages, which are still in discussion.

Following the talk, a vote of thanks on behalf of the Friends of Fishbourne Palace was made by Anne de Potier, our Secretary, to Dr. Scott, with appreciation for the interesting and stimulating presentation.

Join the Curator on 20 July for a behind the scenes tour followed by a chance to ask questions and hear about current research over coffee. Please book in advance (see website). The cost is £15 per person, which includes admission to the Palace and gardens, the tour, tea or coffee and biscuits.

The Friends' Secretary recently spotted this notice in the Palace café. In case the picture is not too clear, the sign says

"Why not become a friend of Fishbourne Roman Palace. Please enquire at the front desk of our museum."

All publicity helps. Thanks, Palace staff.



Coming up at the Palace

What happened here in Sussex after the Roman influence declined? Explore the world of the Anglo Saxons comparing and contrasting two different historical eras. 13-14 July. More details on the Palace website.



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